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RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0377
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA 0299
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0353
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 1896
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0685
RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0794

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000717

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MR](#)

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH COL. VALL - "BETTER OFF WITH
SANCTIONS THAN WHERE AZIZ WILL TAKE US"

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 480

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Summary -- While still looking for a quick transition to new elections, Vall is taking a tougher line on Aziz seeing the current efforts to attack political enemies leading inevitably to a counter-coup with all its inherent risks for civil war. Vall believes serious targeted sanctions might be successful in isolating the 3-4 real instigators of the coup from the rest of the military. The mutually exclusive positions taken by Aziz and Abdallahi offer little chance of an acceptable resolution to the crisis unless and until one side gives. Vall does not exclude running again for President but say he won't participate "in just any elections." End Summary

¶2. (C) The meeting: With foreign delegations increasingly making a call on former head-of-state Ely Mohamed Vall, Charge met with Vall at his residence December 3. This was the first Mission meeting with Vall since the Ambassador's meeting in early September (REFTEL). With an eye on Vall's widely-reported corruption, Charge could not help but notice that Vall's large new residence is the finest he had yet seen in Nouakchott.

¶3. (C) "A Special Coup d'Etat": While using the phrase "coup d'etat" and referring to President Abdallahi as the "legitimate President," Vall spoke of the lead up to the coup as a special circumstance. Vall started by noting that during the transition he had seen both Abdallahi and Ould Daddah as having the necessary intelligence and commitment to democracy to carry through the democratic transition. While preferring Ould Daddah, he had found Abdallahi acceptable but was later disappointed by "the leadership issue." Abdallahi, according to Vall, failed to act "presidential" in a society that demands such from their senior leader. Abdallahi "delegated away his office -- giving too much freedom to Aziz and placing too much operational authority in his Prime Ministers." The excess delegation resulted in Abdallahi being held responsible for every problem but actually managing none of them. Abdallahi "is not a politician" and failed to take care of his parliamentary constituency. All this leading Vall to say Abdallahi "effectively refused to do his job." In discussing the relationship between Aziz and Abdallahi, Vall disputed the idea that Abdallahi had an arrangement where, in support for Aziz and Ghazwany's support

in the election, he could have political freedom and leave Aziz freedom on security matters. "That might have been in his head, but Aziz never saw it that way." Rather, "Aziz thought he had someone who would do as he was told and who initially did so -- in naming the new military leadership along Aziz' directions. When Abdallahi tried to show some independence, Aziz let loose his parliamentarians on him."

¶4. (C) A risk of civil war: Vall said that the attempted coup of 2003, "the first time that we saw the risk of Mauritanian forces firing on each other," had convinced him of the need to get the military out of politics and ultimately loyal to civilian authority. If not, he saw the competition for political power within the military would ultimately lead to internal warfare in the military. Vall said that the August 6 coup had raised the risk of civil war again but not in the way Aziz terms it. Vall said, "the coup was all about those two (Aziz and Ghazwani) with the later addition of the Surete (Hady) and, to a lesser extent, the National Guard (Negri)." The coup itself was not a "coup" in the normal sense but a "rebellion" by these few officers who effectively said, "if you try to touch me, there will be trouble." Vall understood that most of the rest of the military leadership did not support Aziz' power play but, for fear of open military vs. military conflict, came short of resisting him. Vall warned that, "if things stay the way they are, civil war will eventually come." Vall saw no willingness from Aziz to pull back and fully expected international sanctions to continue. Vall said "we are absolutely dependent on donor financing to sustain ourselves" and saw the inevitable impact of Aziz staying in place being

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economic ruin. "He will turn off all the development financing, scare off investors, strip whatever he can out of state industries, and then lead us into collapse." Vall saw the recent spate of arrests and investigations (including Aziz' thinly veiled threat to try Vall for corruption) as evidence to all that Aziz is trying to consolidate his own personal base and bring down any potential opponents. At some point in this downward spiral, Vall saw that the other military leaders will see no option but to turn on Aziz and company.

¶5. (C) Hard to find a middle ground: Vall said he saw little room for maneuver in the positions of the two sides -- "the legitimate president who has no power, and the illegitimate putchist who has all the power." With Abdallahi saying he won't negotiate until the military leave and the military saying they will accept anything short of Abdallahi coming back, Vall saw an impasse. Vall said he advocated "simultaneity" whereby President Abdallahi would return to office to re-establish democratic order, but then yield office to a government of national unity with the sole mandate of organizing new elections "within two months." Charge noted that most observers saw that the only persons ready for such quick elections are "you, Ould Daddah, and Aziz," Vall deflected somewhat saying, "I'm not interested in running in just any elections." Leaving open that he would be interested in the job, he said he was only interested if the electoral plan was fully accepted by the international community. He was not interested in winning elections that would not be deemed free and fair -- suggesting that the plan being touted by Aziz would result in such flawed elections. Vall allowed that there could be some step short of resignation that could allow Abdallahi back but force him to risk his mandate -- adding "Abdallahi wouldn't win 10% today." When asked about international sanctions, Vall said, "I tell my friends we are better off with sanctions than where Aziz will take us." He said that "serious" sanctions against the core 3-4 coup leaders could have an effect of isolating them from the rest of the military. From his comments, Vall seemed to believe the sanctions being discussed now were not "serious" suggestion more along the lines of international legal action instead of visa and assets bans.

